

Preface: Biography and Ethnicity: Development and Changes in Senses of Socio-cultural Belonging in Migrant Populations in the US and Germany

Michaela Köttig, Julia Chaitin, J.P. Linstroth & Gabriele Rosenthal

This special issue is based on the empirical research carried out for our project "Biography and Ethnicity: Development and Changes in Senses of Socio-cultural Belonging in Migrant Populations in the United States and Germany." This research and collaborative teaching project at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University (USA) and at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences at Georg-August-University of Göttingen (Germany) between 2006 and 2008 was characterized by a differing methodological and interdisciplinary approach. Whereas the US-team of researchers followed a psychological and social-anthropological approach, the team of researchers from Germany consisted of sociologists. The German team primarily conducted biographical-narrative interviews, while the team in Florida applied participant observation techniques in addition to biographical and open-ended interviews. The persons belong to different groupings of migrants who have settled in Germany and the United States in order to escape socio-political ethnic conflicts or difficult living conditions in their countries of origin, whereby most of these immigrants may be considered political refugees. The goal of our study was to investigate the processes behind the creation and transformation of ethnic belongings and, in general, collective belongings of various groupings of migrants in variant social contexts. In particular, we examined how different living conditions and different societal contexts influenced the development and transformation of the sense of collective belonging. [1]

Interviews were conducted with migrants from Guatemala, Haiti, and Cuba now living in South Florida as well as migrants from Cuba, Poland, Iran, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and the successor states of former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union now living in Germany. This special issue will introduce the theoretical and methodological considerations as well as the empirical findings of the US and German research teams. The articles reflect upon and compare the interrelated life courses and current life situations of these different groupings of migrants. [2]

This special issue also includes an article by Alex STEPICK and Carol DUTTON STEPICK who were kind enough to contribute an article describing their research dedicated to the same or very similar themes. For many years, these researchers have made migration to South Florida the focus of their work. Their article focuses on migrants' experiences in the country of immigration and describes the coexistence between the established residents and newcomers from Cuba, Haiti, and other Caribbean and Latin American countries. The following chapter, an introduction to this publication, was written by members of the US research team: Julia CHAITIN, J.P. LINSTROTH, and Patrick T. HILLER. Their article presents an overview of their work and discusses the methodology of ethnographic and biographic techniques as well as their views for explaining the particular situation of migrants from Cuba, Haiti, and Guatemala in Florida. Their text also sets the

framework for the following four articles focusing on Cuban, Guatemalan-Maya, and Haitian migrant-ethnicities in South Florida and the relationship between their respective countries of origin and the host country of the United States as well as the interviewees' experiences. These articles offer discussions of aspects of Cuban, Guatemalan-Maya, and Haitian identities and how such views are related to ambivalent belongings, conflictive belongings, gender, home, maintaining indigeneity, social control, and social hybridity. [3]

The first article of the four, written by Robin COOPER, Denese EDSALL, Diana RIVIERA, Julia CHAITIN, and J.P. LINSTROTH, focuses on U.S. Cubans, their ambivalent identities and notions of home. This article is then followed by a contribution by Patrick HILLER, J.P. LINSTROTH, and Paloma AYALA VELA, describing the authors' interviews with members of Guatemala's indigenous population, the Mayas, and why Guatemalan-Mayas separate their identities from the Hispanic population in South Florida. In an additional article, J.P. LINSTROTH, Allison HALL, Mamyrah PROSPER, and Patrick T. HILLER have detailed their empirical findings from a study of Florida's Haitian-born and US-born Haitian population. Finally, Robin COOPER, J.P. LINSTROTH, and Julia CHAITIN's article addresses the particular situation of Cuban and Haitian women, regarding issues of gender and social control and the pressures of home country identity and traditions on female immigrant lives. [4]

The second part of the special issue contains articles written by the German research team. This section begins with an article by Gabriele ROSENTHAL written in collaboration with Michaela KÖTTIG. The essay describes the theoretical and methodological approach used in the empirical case reconstructions that are discussed in the following articles. The essay introduces a social-constructivist and biographical-theory concept of the creation and transformation of collective belongings and attempts to develop the methodological implications of this approach. On the basis of empirical findings, this article highlights the enormous impact that the interaction of familial pasts and life stories with the historical and cultural context has on the construction and reinterpretation of collective belongings. The authors refer to the biographical case reconstructions discussed in the following articles as well as the theoretical generalizations derived from these reconstructions. In the following article, Michaela KÖTTIG discusses the particularities in the constructions of collective belongings among migrants from Cuba in Germany and South Florida, demonstrating a specific relation to art as well as the special role art plays in the construction of a Cuban we-image. The article by Rosa-Maria BRANDHORST also addresses the issue of a Cuban migrant in Germany and his insecurity vis-à-vis his feelings of belonging. The contribution by Jana BALLENTHIEN and Corring BÜCHING describes the intergenerational transmission of constructions of ethnic belonging using the example of a family of ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union. Sonja GRÜN's article takes up a similar theme and, based on her case reconstruction of a migrant from Bosnia, also describes the efficacy of the family history. Jan KÜVER's contribution, which represents the final article in this special issue, focuses on the case study of a migrant from Sierra Leone

whose familial and societal history led to clearly ambivalent feelings and ambiguous constructions of collective belonging. [5]

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and Nova Southeastern University for their crucial and generous assistance in funding this project. Without their support, this project could never have come to be. Furthermore, we would like to thank all students involved in the project in Göttingen and Fort Lauderdale who have collaborated on this project and helped put the research ideas that were developed here into practice. Special thanks go to the team of students at the Georg-August-University of Göttingen who assisted in preparing and conducting the conference "Ethnicity, Belonging, Biography, and Ethnography" in December 2007—particularly Diana STRUVE, who coordinated the entire process. We also wish to thank the colleagues who offered their professional assistance both on a practical as well as at the research level. Here we would like to thank, among others, Alex and Carol STEPICK from the Florida International University in Miami. Finally, we are particularly indebted to all of those who gave us their trust and took the time to provide us with an insight into their lives and their social surroundings.

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FQS 10(3), Michaela Köttig, Julia Chaitin, J.P. Linstroth & Gabriele Rosenthal:
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Citation

Köttig, Michaela; Chaitin, Julia; Linstroth, J.P. & Rosenthal, Gabriele (2009). Preface: Biography and Ethnicity: Development and Changes in Senses of Socio-cultural Belonging in Migrant Populations in the US and Germany. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(2), <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0903E12>.